The Builder.

No. CCCXXIV.

SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 1849.

WE are anxious that the committee of the House of Commons appointed to investigate the [want of] constitution, [mis] management, and [strange] proceedings of the Schools of Designs, should get earnestly to work; and, still more so, that the result of the inquiry may be reformation and satisfactory progress. For some years we have endeavoured strenuously and continuously, by directing attention to abuses in the schools, and to the lamentably small results of a large outlay upon them, to lead to improvement. We were very unpopular in some quarters in consequence,—THE BUILDER was positively a forbidden book at one time in Somerset House,—but our opinions became ultimately the universal opinions, and a certain amount of good was done.

We will not compare the present condition of the London school with what it was at the time to which we are referring, when undisguised incompetence reigned, and entire disorganisation resulted. Still, the proceedings appear to be far from satisfactory in some respects, and the issue unsatisfactory in all. In architecture we want artistical operatives, and we have been looking to our schools of design to produce them. Where are they? Echo derisively answers, where? The *Journal of Design*, which has commenced an onslaught, says,—

"What a specimen these schools afford of Government administration, when we recollect that there has been expended, in one way or another, by Parliamentary grants and local subscriptions, &c., something near 100,000*l.* on these schools, and that it is a doubt whether it be possible to instance, out of all last year's manufactures, any ONE single useful article of *first-rate* quality which is the unassisted design of a pupil who has been *wholly* educated in these schools! We may be wrong in the sweeping doubt here implied, and we shall be glad to be proved to be so; and we shall be greatly obliged to manufacturers and designers who will point out to us any articles of manufacture of original design, produced within the last twelve months, as the best fabrics of their class, which have been designed by a student educated altogether in the school,—one who has studied in the school, say not less than four years, and who does not exceed the age of twenty-five years. We do not want to be informed of the designs of those who were practising designers before they entered the school, and had mastered the difficulties and rudiments of their profession before they entered it. We want to know the works of the real scholars of the school."

We have again and again shown that to call the establishment a School of Design was ridiculous, it was simply a drawing school—design was not thought of; it was even asserted by some in authority that to consider it in the system of instruction was quite unnecessary,—drawing, and merely drawing, was all they had to think of.

That this is not the opinion there now, may be gathered from some of the very good lectures recently delivered to the students. Thus, Mr. Dyce said;—

"The power of imitation, that is to say, skill in drawing, painting, modelling any given object,—although to a great extent the ultimate purpose of the instruction in an academy of fine art, is, in a School of Design, but *the means to an end*. The opposition formerly made to introducing into this school certain branches of instruction, which were reckoned proper only to academies of fine art, was partly grounded on the supposition that, if the means of elementary study were unlimited, the effect of the school would be to overflow the country with artists; and so it was thought that if these branches were excluded, or if not excluded, were taught only up to a certain point, the school would be made to keep its due place in the scale of art. Now although these views arose from an indistinct apprehension of the purpose of the school, and of the means required to effect it, it must be admitted that the fear lest the means should be mistaken for the end, was not without reason. If the school were to stop short at the point of having taught the art of drawing, painting, or modelling—that is to say, if the studies terminated in a purpose which is common to it and general drawing-schools, not only would the fears I have spoken of be realised, but the school would, in point of fact, have abandoned its specific claim on public support. It was established by Government, *not to afford general instruction in art, but to teach the special art of designing ornament, and its application to manufactures and decoration*. The proper business of the school, indeed, may be said to commence where other schools of art leave off; at all events, however much, in certain respects, the school occupies ground common to it and to general drawing-schools, it has beyond this the definite and specific object of *cultivating ornamental art. This is its peculiar province: this is its primary business and occupation.*"

It is something to find that this apparently obvious fact has been at last arrived at. We shall keep an eye on the course of proceedings before the committee.

We should be glad to know what has become of the Female School, formerly of Somerset House. It was sent into lodgings somewhere in the Strand,—on the same grounds, it would seem, which led boards of guardians to send pauper children to Tooting, and has never been heard of since.

Concerning the provincial schools we have lately received several communications, including an amusing budget of complaints from *Paisley*, written by a resident manufacturer; but as they are wholly *ex parte*, they need inquiry before publication.

In Glasgow, a fortnight ago, the annual meeting of the School of Design was held, and the committee said in their report that the number of students had increased (there are now 856, male and female), that the works of art had been arranged by the present master (Mr. Wilson), and that arrangements had been made to render the Library of Reference there accessible to designers, for whom a commodious apartment had been appropriated, where they might study four days in the week.

To the Sheffield School of Design the Government grant has been increased from 200*l.* to 550*l.* per annum, if our informant is correct, and two assistant masters have been appointed in consequence.

We are so little used to Government grants in aid of art, that the sums appropriated to the School of Design seem large. If it were well applied, however, and produced due fruit, the public, so far from objecting to such votes, would willingly see them increased. A correspondent of the *Literary Gazette* gives a list of sums just voted by the National Assembly of France, for the encouragement of science and art, including the following, which contrasts strongly with the doings of our own Government in that respect:—

	Francs.
"*Etablissement des Beaux Arts*.....	447,000
Personnel of the National Museums	148,700
Matériel of ditto	151,700
Works of art and decorations of public edifices; *including* the purchase of pictures and statues for the *Louvre*	950,000
Preservation of ancient historical monuments.....	750,000
Encouragements and subscriptions to the Fine Arts	186,000
Annual indemnities or temporary assistance to artists, dramatic authors, musical composers, and their widows	137,700
Institut National	581,300
Museum of Natural History	486,350
Astronomical establishments	121,760
Bibliothèque Nationale.....	283,600
Ditto, extraordinary credit	60,000
Service of public libraries.....	222,300
Literary subscriptions	170,000
Learned societies	50,000
Voyages, scientific missions, public lectures	112,000
Encouragement and assistance to men of science and literary men	197,400
Unpublished documents on natural history	150,000
Subvention to *Caisses de retraite*	500,000
Re-impression or publication of scientific works.....	1,939

with much more for public education, faculties of theology, medicine, law, &c."

In other parts abroad, they seem more inclined to dissipate than to collect works of art,—to knock down rather than build up. The revolutionary government of Rome are said to be in treaty for the sale of the Apollo Belvidere to American agents, and of many other treasures of art garnered in the Eternal City, to English and French speculators. The *Times*, in a leading article, deprecated the removal of the inestimable monuments which form the chief glory of that city, and with the view of preventing Englishmen from being a party in the disgraceful proceeding, urged, that should the legitimate government be restored, it would be difficult to defend a possession which had been acquired with a full knowledge of the circumstances attending the sale. "It appears to us," continues the journalist, "that the purchase of these monuments from Mazzini's committees can no more be justified than the purchase of diamond necklaces from those gentry who at this season of last year were so comfortably housed in the Tuileries. The buyers of this stolen jewellery were unhesitatingly prosecuted, and if the buyers of pictures and statues escape a similar summons, it will be owing less to the essential difference of their acts than to the fortunate difference of their position. It would be the height of injustice if through the interested concert of those who should be more uprightly minded, such a gang of desperadoes as that which now lords it over Rome, should be enabled during their ephemeral usurpation to inflict so grievous a loss upon their country, and to damage so irreparably the government which will presently supersede them. We hope better from the generosity, if not from the prudence of Englishmen."

A friend writing us on the subject of art, says, with reference to these remarks,—"I was amused the other day with reading the leading article of the *Times* on the shameful proceedings of the anti-papal government of Rome in disposing of the 'works of art,

For more information on OCR and PDF Compression visit ThePaperlessOffice.org